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Planting the Vegetable Garden According to a Food Budget

A dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agricultural period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC stations, Wednesday, April 4, 1934.

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MR. BEATTIE: Hello, Miss Van Deman. How are you today?

MISS VAN DEMAN: I'm fine. How is it with you? Planted your garden yet?

MR. BEATTIE: That's just what I want to talk to you about. I am planting my early garden this week and I want to get your ideas about planning my garden according to one of your food budgets.

MISS VAN DEMAN: A food budget for an adequate diet at moderate cost? Is that about what you're aiming at?

MR. BEATTIE: Yes, and make it for a family of four -- there are three in my family but we always figure on one extra.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, I think I can help you out. Shall we start with the leafy, green, and yellow vegetables? In our food budgets, we put those together because they're alike in food value, both very rich in vitamins and minerals. For a family of two grown-ups and two youngsters in their 'teens, we figure about 425 pounds of this class of vegetables for the year.

MR. BEATTIE: My, that seems like a lot.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, that's only 8 pounds a week you know, about a serving a day for each member of the family.

MR. BEATTIE: That's so. Now let's see how much garden space I will need to produce that amount. Does that include the necessary amount for canning and storage?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes. We're talking about the whole year round. That's what a food budget means.

MR. BEATTIE: Let's take the leafy vegetables first. I have lettuce plants in my cold frame and I will set about 100 of these plants in my garden this week. If we have more lettuce than we can use, I'll feed the surplus to the chickens. Spinach is another crop that I grow. I plant a bed about 5 feet wide and 20 feet long. That calls for about 2 ounces of seed and we have all the spinach we can use during its short season. Later we depend upon Swiss chard for our supply of greens.

MISS VAN DEMAN: What about cabbage? And broccoli?

MR. BEATTIE: Oh yes, we grow a row of early cabbage about 50 feet long, or about 40 plants. This will keep us supplied until midsummer, then we begin on the broccoli. Of course, I plant about 100 late cabbage plants for fall and winter use.

(over)

MISS VAN DEMAN: For a yellow vegetable, I suppose you have at least one row of carrots across your garden.

MR. BEATTIE: Yes indeed, in fact I plant two rows of carrots. One quite early and a second row a little later. Also about 25 feet of radishes and a full row of beets. We are very fond of the beet thinnings for greens.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, I am too. There's nothing quite like those little tender beets cut up with the beet greens. And while we're back on the leafy kinds, what about turnips for greens as well as roots?

MR. BEATTIE: Yes, I always plant both the white and yellow or rutabaga turnips. I usually plant them on the land where I grow my early peas.

MISS VAN DEMAN: By the way, Mr. Beattie, have you planted your peas yet?

MR. BEATTIE: Yes, I have made one planting and will make a second planting next week. We are very fond of fresh peas from our garden and sometimes we have enough to can a few quarts. I usually plant about 300 feet of rows of peas each spring and by using early and late varieties we manage to have peas over a period of about six weeks.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Do you keep the snap bean season going that same way?

MR. BEATTIE: Yes, I make the first planting of early Bountiful or of Tender green snap beans just as soon as the ground becomes reasonably warm. Then I follow up with other plantings at intervals of every two or three weeks -- not many at any one time -- perhaps fifty feet of row each time. That gives us a continuous supply for our table.

MISS VAN DEMAN: And some for canning, of course. By the way, you always use the pressure cooker for canning your beans and peas and all your vegetables except tomatoes, don't you?

MR. BEATTIE: We sure do. We would not consider it safe to can these vegetables by any other method. Of course, you must have good tender vegetables in order to produce a good canned product.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I agree. You can't improve the quality of any vegetable by canning or drying. It must be good to start with. But I'm afraid we're getting off the track a little.

MR. BEATTIE: Yes, we are. Now what does your budget say about tomatoes?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, my budget groups tomatoes and citrus fruits together because they're so much alike in food value. For a family of four we suggest nearly 400 pounds a year, that is almost 100 pounds per person, or about 2 pounds per week for each adult in the family. Of course how you divide this total between citrus fruit and tomatoes depends a lot on where you live and what your family prefers.

MR. BEATTIE: Naturally. I believe I would like to split that about 50 - 50. We are very fond of tomatoes, also of citrus fruits, so I set about 25 early tomato plants, and prune them and train them to stakes. Then I plant twice that number for late tomatoes.

MISS VAN DEMAN: You include your canning tomatoes in this late crop, I suppose. You'll want to provide for at least 75 to 80 quarts of canned tomatoes.

MR. BEATTIE: Yes. The 50 late plants which are allowed to grow on the ground will usually produce about 300 pounds in all. Allowing for considerable loss this provides for 75 to 80 quarts of canned tomatoes, in addition to what we use fresh on the table during the late summer and fall.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Now, let's see where we stand. We've taken care of the leafy and the green vegetables; two good yellow kinds, carrots and rutabagas; and tomatoes. Shall we leave the potatoes out of the garden plan and go on to the last group?

MR. BEATTIE: Yes, suppose we do. As a matter of fact, potatoes and sweetpotatoes are usually grown in truck patches outside the regular garden, but we don't want to neglect to grow a good supply. How many potatoes and sweetpotatoes does your budget call for?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Around 12 bushels for your family of four. You know, those two high school youngsters need as much or more than you grown-ups.

MR. BEATTIE: That's true all right. What is the other item on your list?

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, here again my budget puts the fruits and vegetables together. In addition to those we've mentioned it calls for about a thousand pounds of other vegetables and fruits. For our purposes right now, we'll divide this about evenly between the two. That will mean roughly about 500 more pounds of vegetables from the garden.

MR. BEATTIE: All right, we will make that up from lima beans, sweet corn ---

MISS VAN DEMAN: And don't forget our good old friend the onion ---

MR. BEATTIE: . No, I won't. If anyone has difficulty getting onion sets this year they can plant the seeds or get the Southern grown onion plants. I believe in having plenty of onions for seasoning. I plant about 100 feet of row in my garden.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, that must certainly give you plenty of onions to season all your soups and stews and have some left over to French-fry and boil and scallop and use in all sorts of ways. Now what about the sweet corn?

MR. BEATTIE: I usually make about three plantings of sweet corn -- Golden Bantam for early, Country Gentleman for medium, and Stowells Evergreen for late. About five rows across my garden for each planting.

MISS VAN DEMAN: We haven't mentioned okra, or parsnips, or salsify, or squashes. Of course, from the nutrition standpoint the squashes properly belong with those yellow vegetables we were talking about.

MR. BEATTIE: I grow them all in my garden. Okra, as you know, is rather a southern vegetable but it can be grown as far north as Pennsylvania and Missouri.

MISS VAN DEMAN: I've picked it in a friend's garden in the Hudson River Valley.

MR. BEATTIE: I don't doubt your statement. As a matter of fact, okra can be grown as far north as Southern Michigan. As for the squashes, I plant about five hills of summer squashes and eight or ten hills of late squashes for winter storage and use. Five hills are plenty of the little yellow crook-neck squashes for summer use and the ten hills of Hubbard or Boston Marrow provide 20 to 25 nice squashes for the winter. I plant a short row each of salsify and parsnips and simply leave them in the ground until we want them to use in the winter.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Well, your garden's certainly getting off to a good start. I'm sure it's going to meet or maybe beat my food budget. More than likely, you'll go a step higher than our plan for a diet at moderate cost. That's the beauty of having a garden of your own. You can have as many vegetables as a very liberal diet includes and yet not have to lay out a lot of cash for them every day. You can make your meals all through the summer twice as high in food value and still hold down the cost in dollars and cents.

MR. BEATTIE: I think you are right and I always go on the theory that it is best to grow plenty of the more important vegetables; it costs no more and it is nice to have them.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Now, Mr. Beattie, I've got a crow to pick with you.

MR. BEATTIE: Why, what have I done?

MISS VAN DEMAN: About that cherry pie the other day. You talked about it so much you got all our friends around here so hungry they could hardly wait for lunch. Was that a kind thing to do?

MR. MAYO: I'll answer that for you, Mr. Beattie. It certainly was not kind.

MR. BEATTIE: Well, all I said was that I'm good judg of cherry pie. What's more, I'm ready to prove it any time.

MISS VAN DEMAN: All right, here's your chance and here's the pie. It's made with some of those delicious frozen cherries you were talking about. Go ahead, have a piece and you, too, Mr. Teuton, and Mr. Mayo.

MR. BEATTIE: What do you know about that -- a real, old-fashioned deep cherry pie, and it is still hot from the over. Oh boy! Hey Tueton give me your knife to cut this pie.

MR. TEUTON: With pleasure, Mr. Beattie. Gee, I wish Mr. Salisbury was here to get a piece of this wonderful pie.

MISS VAN DEMAN: Yes, and the boys in Chicago, too. I'll bet they like cherry pie.

MR. BEATTIE: Here you are folks! ---'um ---'um, but it's good. (With a sound like a mouth full of pie---) Miss Van Deman, it's okay.

MR. MAYO: Mr. Tueton, don't forget to give the weather.

MR. TUETON: Oh, gee, Mayo, that would come just as I'm fixing to take my first bite of Miss Van Deman's cherry pie. Well, all right, I'll give you more weather in less time than I've ever done before. (Weather)